

Thank you for your comment, Ruth Rieman.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarM60220.

Comment Date: September 14, 2009 13:27:30PM
Solar Energy Development PEIS
Comment ID: SolarM60220

First Name: Ruth
Middle Initial: E
Last Name: Rieman
Organization: California Desert Coalition
Address: P. O. Box 1508
Address 2:
Address 3:
City: Yucca Valley
State: CA
Zip: 92286
Country: USA
Email: cadesertco@gmail.com
Privacy Preference: Don't withhold name or address from public record
Attachment: BLM_Solar PEIS_CDC-scoping comments-9-14-09.doc

Comment Submitted:

Please record the comments from CDC as given in the attached word doc.

Ruth E. Rieman
CDC Vice Chair



CALIFORNIA DESERT COALITION

P.O. Box 1508
Yucca Valley, CA 92286
www.CaDesertCo.org

September 14, 2009

Solar Energy PEIS
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S. Cass Ave. - EVS/900
Argonne IL 60439

RE: Solar Energy Development Programmatic EIS: Solar Energy Study Area Public Scoping Comments

Dear BLM and DOE staff:

The California Desert Coalition (CDC) is pleased to provide the following public scoping comments on the Solar Energy Development Programmatic EIS: Solar Energy Study Area.

CDC is a citizens' advocacy group formed in 2007 to oppose the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power's (LADWP's) preferred alignment for its Green Path North transmission line project, the purpose of the new transmission line being to transmit electricity generated from remote renewable energy sources, including solar, in California's Imperial Valley to the Los Angeles transmission system. This preferred alignment lies outside of existing federally designated energy corridors. Our support consists of over 5,000 citizens who have signed a petition in opposition to LADWP's preferred alignment. Additionally, the counties of San Bernardino and Riverside, as well as numerous cities in the Morongo Basin and Coachella Valley, have lined up in protest against this project alignment, passing resolutions of opposition to Green Path North. CDC and our two county governments recommend that Green Path North be routed in existing energy corridors, such as the alternative alignment along Interstate 10.

Considering CDC's mission regarding the Green Path North transmission project and the stated intent of the Solar PEIS to "consider whether designation by BLM of additional electricity transmission corridors on BLM-administered lands is necessary to facilitate utility-scale solar energy development" (NOI, May 29, 2008), CDC has a vested interest in its submittal of the following comments.

SESAs Not Best Method for Executive Order 13212 Compliance

CDC does not see a direct and compelling relationship, as referred to in the Solar PEIS NOI of May 29, 2008, between Executive Order 13212 and the need for Solar Energy Study Areas (SESAs) as proposed during this scoping period. EO 13212 calls for executive departments "to expedite projects that will increase the production, transmission, or conservation of energy." There is no imperative in this that favors production over conservation. Considering the enormous reductions in greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuel consumption that are possible through conservation efforts without altering the environmental, recreational, scenic and other values of our public lands, CDC contends that SESAs are not necessary.

In addition, the NOA of June 30, 2009, states that existing solar applications (received before June 30, 2009), whether within a SESA or outside SESAs, will continue to be processed under the BLM's

current procedures.” There were already 158 active solar applications, covering 1.8 million acres, with a projected capacity to generate 97,000 megawatts of electricity. Considering that many of these applications may gain approval, the sacrifice of this much public land already is more than is necessary considering the many other renewable energy options, including conservation, use of previously disturbed private lands, and local distributed renewable energy generation, such as solar PV on rooftops of commercial buildings and residences.

SESAs Will Not Contribute to Energy Policy Act of 2005 Compliance

Establishment of SESAs as proposed during this scoping period will not contribute to fulfilling the requirements of Title II, Section 211, of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 as referred to in the Solar PEIS NOI of May 29, 2008. This 2005 EPA section provides that the Secretary of the Interior should, within 10 years of enactment of the Act, “. . . seek to have approved non-hydropower renewable energy projects located on the public lands with a generation capacity of at least 10,000 megawatts of electricity.” With active solar applications on public lands with a projected capacity to generate 97,000 megawatts, and many more thousands of megawatts projected for existing wind and geothermal project applications, compliance with the stated 2005 EPA section is already assured.

SESAs do not comply with DOE Goal #2

In accordance with the Energy Policy Act of 2005, the DOE completed a Strategic Plan for the US Climate Change Technology Program (CCTP). The CCTP strives to install federal leadership to facilitate multi-agency planning and coordination. Energy Supply or Goal #2 of that Program favors distributed energy, because it “provides the consumer with a greater choice, local control and more efficient waste utilization to boost efficiency and lower emissions”. This goal lends support that energy production should be planned close to point of use and that remote and rural SESAs are neither strategic nor cumulatively beneficial for reduction of Green House Gas emissions.

Existing Solar Applications Should be Disallowed Outside SESAs

CDC contends that identification of environmentally responsible SESAs could contribute to renewable energy development efforts that would reduce the nation’s dependence on fossil fuels and have an impact on global warming if existing solar applications (received before July 30, 2009) were disallowed outside of the SESAs. The BLM has accepted many solar transmission applications for ROWs in environmentally sensitive areas and in areas that have no access to sufficient existing transmission and are far from designated transmission corridors. Therefore, CDC requests that no solar projects, whether applied for before or after June 30, 2009, be approved outside of solar energy zones (SEZs) developed using SESAs to determine areas with minimal environmental impacts.

Pisgah, Iron Mountain, Riverside East and Imperial East SESAs and Other Lands Being Analyzed for Solar Development in PEIS

The current scoping review considers four SESAs (Pisgah, Iron Mountain, Riverside East, and Imperial East), as well as other lands being analyzed for solar development in the PEIS, that are within CDC’s area of interest. However, evaluation of these SESAs is beyond the scope of CDC’s mission and expertise. CDC defers to comments on these SESAs and other lands submitted for this scoping effort by The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) and hereby incorporates TWC’s comments by reference.

Need for Utility-Scale Solar Energy Development on BLM Lands Overestimated

CDC contends that the Solar PEIS overestimates the need for utility-scale solar energy development on BLM lands and thus fails to protect the environmental, recreational, scenic and other values of our public lands. The addition of SESAs to the Solar PEIS does not overcome this deficiency.

- Distributed solar generation can and should play a significant role in solar energy development. For example, the U.S. Department of Energy states regarding its Solar Energy Technology Program, “PV systems built in the ‘brownfields’—the estimated 5 million acres of abandoned industrial sites in our nation's cities—could supply 90% of America's current electricity.” And, this figure doesn’t take into account the potential for PV systems on the rooftops of residences and commercial buildings.
- Solar energy projects should be sited on previously disturbed lands, e.g., fallowed agricultural lands and abandoned industrial sites, rather than on undisturbed lands that preserve the natural environment. This applies to BLM lands, but also to private lands. More emphasis should be put on utilizing private lands that have been disturbed in order to protect our dwindling supply of pristine public lands.

Considerations in Designating Additional Transmission Corridors

While the Solar PEIS NOA addressing SESAs states that a criterion for establishing SESAs is that they “be near existing roads and existing or designated transmission line routes,” the Solar PEIS NOI also states, “The need to designate additional electricity transmission corridors on BLM-administered lands to facilitate utility-scale solar energy development will be considered. The PEIS may include NEPA analysis for a limited number of site-specific corridor designations on BLM-administered lands, as appropriate.”

CDC contends that the BLM in determining the sufficiency of existing designated corridors should take into consideration that the primary reason for developing solar renewable energy is to replace nonrenewable sources of energy, such as fossil fuels. Since much of our Nation’s energy is currently supplied from fossil fuel sources, the BLM must consider the transmission line capacity that will be made available when use of fossil fuel sources is discontinued.

CDC further contends that, should BLM consider designating a corridor that currently has contingent corridor status under the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan, the BLM must consider advances in scientific understanding that have led to changes in management philosophy subsequent to establishment of contingent corridors in 1980. For example, a 1998 CDCA Plan amendment states, “Since preparation of the 1980 CDCA Plan, management philosophy has changed from single-species management to ecosystem management, in recognition of the interdependence of species and their environment. To that end, managers now seek to maintain ecosystem functions and the diversity of life.”

BLM must also recognize changes in land status and ownership within any contingent corridor since the time the corridor was originally allowed contingency status in 1980.

Contingent Corridor S

Specifically, Contingent Corridor S should never become a designated corridor due to a changed BLM management philosophy and to significant changes to land designation and ownership that have occurred within Contingent Corridor S since this contingent corridor was included in the original CDCA Plan in 1980, nearly 30 years ago.

- The Big Morongo Canyon Preserve was designated an area of critical environmental concern in a CDCA Plan amendment in 1982. In 1998, another CDCA Plan amendment expanded the Big Morongo ACEC to 29,000 acres in order to

“ . . . preserve the remaining corridors connecting Joshua Tree National Park, Big Morongo Canyon ACEC, BLM’s San Gorgonio Wilderness, and the San Bernardino National Forest to maintain genetic diversity . . . of desert bighorn sheep and other wildlife to prevent local extinction from episodic events such as wildfire and drought.”

The amendment also states, referring to lands added to the ACEC by the amendment, that

“Recognizing the need to maintain these wildlife corridors, bighorn sheep fawning areas and watering sites, BLM and private conservancy groups have been acquiring lands The private conservancy groups in turn have been transferring title of their acquired lands to BLM via sale or donation.”

Considering that the earlier identified Contingent Corridor S, if designated, would establish a new energy corridor 2 to 5 miles wide running for 10 miles through the biologically critical Big Morongo ACEC and that this ACEC was put together in part through the donations of private conservancy groups whose intention was to preserve the land in its natural state in perpetuity, Contingent Corridor S lands no longer remain appropriate for consideration as a designated corridor.

- Pioneertown Mountains Preserve lands were purchased by The Wildlands Conservancy, a private, nonprofit conservancy organization, in the 1990s, i.e., subsequent to identification of Corridor S as a contingent corridor in 1980. This land was purchased through the donations of private citizens for the purpose of preserving the land in a natural state in perpetuity. Pioneertown Mountains Preserve protects wildlife linkages (i.e. wildlife corridors) that connect the San Bernardino Mountains with Joshua Tree National Park.

Considering that Contingent Corridor S, if designated, would transect Pioneertown Mountains Preserve, its privately donated conservation lands and its biologically significant wildlife linkages, CDC contends that Contingent Corridor S lands no longer remain appropriate for consideration as a designated corridor.

- Thirty miles of private lands are interspersed among the BLM lands traversed by Contingent Corridor S. If this were to become a designated corridor, any transmission line or water, oil, or gas pipeline project approved by BLM would have to gain federal approval to exercise eminent domain powers and remove the land from its private owners. With respect to expediting transmission for solar energy projects, this would cause indeterminable delays.
- Climate change has furthered the necessity for preserving the wildlife linkages that transect contingency corridor S in order to allow species migration as temperatures rise and species attempt to establish themselves in new suitable habitat. Since many wildlife linkages have been identified as crossing the path of Contingent Corridor S, this land should never become a designated corridor thereby preventing climate change biological adaptation.

Green Path North Proposed Transmission Project and Solar Energy Applications

In December of 2006, the Los Angeles Department of Water & Power (LADWP) applied to the BLM for a ROW across public lands for its Green Path North transmission project. The ROW requested was also selected as the preferred alignment in this application. Although LADWP could have chosen to align this project's transmission lines in an existing energy corridor along the I-10 Freeway that traverses little public land, LADWP chose instead to prefer an alignment that crosses 55 miles of mostly pristine public lands, land LADWP could use for a pittance, a little over \$14 per linear mile per year.

LADWP's preferred alignment for Green Path North traverses California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) lands but does not fall within a CDCA Plan designated corridor. Thus, to approve this transmission line alignment would require amending the area's land use plan and designating a new energy corridor on public lands.

LADWP's preferred alignment does lie within the CDCA Plan's Contingent Corridor S commented on above. As discussed above, Contingent Corridor S should never become a designated corridor due to changes in BLM management philosophy and significant changes to land designation and ownership since Contingent Corridor S was included in the original CDCA Plan in 1980. Thus LADWP's preferred alignment for its Green Path North project should not be approved and the alternative alignment along the existing I-10 energy corridor should be selected for this project.

Because of LADWP's ROW application submittal and choice of preferred alignment, several applications by solar energy developers have been submitted to the BLM along LADWP's preferred alignment, even though there is no existing designated corridor in this area. CDC contends that these solar applications, Serial Numbers CA CA 049561, CA CA 049361, CA CA 048819, and CA CA 050712, should not be approved as the solar projects are far from any designated corridor. Also the projects do not fall within a proposed SESA.

Thank you for reviewing these comments regarding the Solar Energy Development PEIS and the proposed solar energy study areas.

Sincerely,



Ruth E. Rieman, Vice Chair
California Desert Coalition